

Glimpses on The History of Tibet

an Introduction

On January 20, 2009, His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited Auroville to inaugurate the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture.

During an audience with the Tibetans living in the area, he spoke about the ancient history of Tibet. At the end of the talk, His Holiness asked the Pavilion to prepare an exhibition on the History of Tibet. The present display is our answer to the wish of His Holiness who has kindly presented two signed thankas for the purpose.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Sri Aurobindo saw 'India of the Ages', an India which he described thus: *"Spirituality is the master-key of the Indian mind; the sense of the infinite is native to it. India saw from the beginning that the physical does not get its full sense until it stands in right relation to the supra-physical; she saw that the complexity of the universe could not be explained in the present terms of man or seen by his superficial sight, that there were other powers behind, other powers within man himself of which he is normally unaware, that he is conscious only of a small part of himself, that the invisible always surrounds the visible, the suprasensible the sensible, even as infinity always surrounds the finite."*

This could also apply to Tibet which for millennia, long before the introduction of Buddhism, has been looking 'inside' to discover the secrets of the Spirit. This is clearly the thread linking these glimpses on the political history of the Roof of the World.

We have faced several difficulties in preparing the exhibition. The first was how to slice more than 3000 years of history (His Holiness requested that the latest archaeological discoveries be mentioned) in 25 portions without betraying the flow of events and people. Impossible, said the experts, unfortunately (in fact fortunately) we had no choice but to try. This exhibition should be seen as 25 images of this ancient nation's history.

The two thankas presented by His Holiness gave a direction to our search: the first, depicting Santarakshita and Padmasambhava, who established the roots of Buddhism in Tibet, particularly the Nalanda lineage and the Indian Tantrik tradition; the second of the Three Religious Kings which showed the military strength of the Tibetan Empire at one point in history; in His Holiness's words: *"There have been occasions when Tibetan rulers conquered vast areas of China and other neighbouring states. This, however, does not mean that we Tibetans can lay claim to these territories."*

These Glimpses demonstrate that in the past Tibet was an independent nation and though it lived in isolation for sometime, during most of the last 4000 years, Tibet had constant contacts and interactions with the nearing nations and cultures.

Our history, dating back more than two thousand years, has been one of independence. At no time, since the founding of our nation in 127 BC, have we Tibetans conceded our sovereignty to a foreign power. As with all nations, Tibet experienced periods in which our neighbors — Mongol, Manchu, Chinese, British and the Gorkhas of Nepal sought to establish influence over us. These eras have been brief and the Tibetan people have never accepted them as constituting a loss of our national sovereignty.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama